

CHAPTER 28

Post-War Prosperity and Cold War Fears, 1945-1960



Figure 28.1 *Is This Tomorrow?* warned Americans about the potential horrors of living under a Communist dictatorship. Postwar propaganda such as this comic book, the cover of which showed invading Russians attacking Americans and the U.S. flag in flames, served to drum up fear during the Cold War.

Chapter Outline

- 28.1 The Challenges of Peacetime
- 28.2 The Cold War
- 28.3 The American Dream
- 28.4 Popular Culture and Mass Media
- 28.5 The African American Struggle for Civil Rights

Introduction

Is This Tomorrow? (**Figure 28.1**), a 1947 comic book, highlights one way that the federal government and some Americans revived popular sentiment in opposition to Communism. The United States and the Soviet Union, allies during World War II, had different visions for the postwar world. As Joseph Stalin, premier of the Soviet Union, tightened his grip on the countries of Eastern Europe, Americans began to fear that it was his goal to spread the Communist revolution throughout the world and make newly independent nations puppets of the Soviet Union. To enlist as many Americans as possible in the fight against Soviet domination, the U.S. government and purveyors of popular culture churned out propaganda intended to convince average citizens of the dangers posed by the Soviet Union. Artwork such as the cover of *Is This Tomorrow?*, which depicts Russians attacking Americans, including a struggling woman and an African American veteran still wearing his uniform, played upon postwar fears of Communism and of a future war with the Soviet Union. These fears dominated American life and affected foreign policy, military strategy, urban planning, popular culture, and the civil rights movement.

28.1 The Challenges of Peacetime

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the issues that the nation faced during demobilization
- Explain the goals and objectives of the Truman administration
- Evaluate the actions taken by the U.S. government to address the concerns of returning veterans

The decade and a half immediately following the end of World War II was one in which middle- and working-class Americans hoped for a better life than the one they lived before the war. These hopes were tainted by fears of economic hardship, as many who experienced the Great Depression feared a return to economic decline. Others clamored for the opportunity to spend the savings they had accumulated through long hours on the job during the war when consumer goods were rarely available.

African Americans who had served in the armed forces and worked in the defense industry did not wish to return to “normal.” Instead, they wanted the same rights and opportunities that other Americans had. Still other citizens were less concerned with the economy or civil rights; instead, they looked with suspicion at the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe. What would happen now that the United States and the Soviet Union were no longer allies, and the other nations that had long helped maintain a balance of power were left seriously damaged by the war? Harry Truman, president for less than a year when the war ended, was charged with addressing all of these concerns and giving the American people a “fair deal.”

DEMOBILIZATION AND THE RETURN TO CIVILIAN LIFE

The most immediate task to be completed after World War II was demobilizing the military and reintegrating the veterans into civilian life. In response to popular pressure and concerns over the budget, the United States sought to demobilize its armed forces as quickly as possible. Many servicemen, labeled the “Ohio boys” (Over the Hill in October), threatened to vote Republican if they were not home by

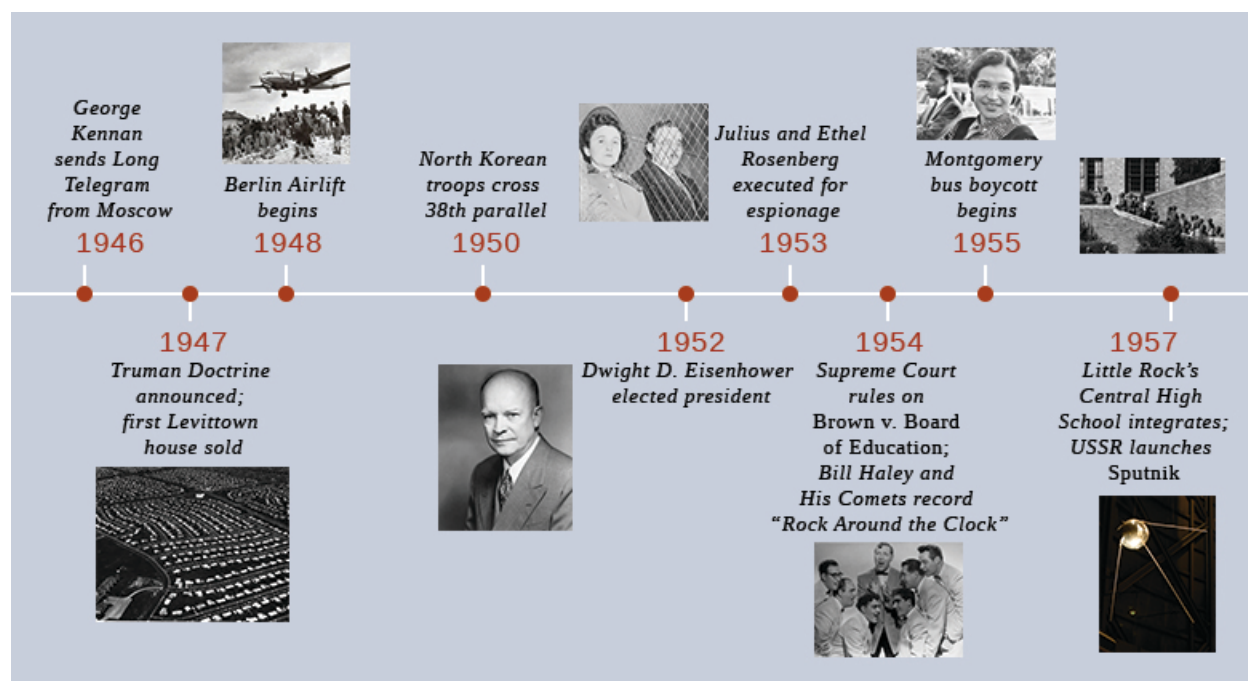


Figure 28.2 (credit: “1953”: modification of work by Library of Congress)

Christmas 1946. Understandably, this placed a great deal of pressure on the still-inexperienced president to shrink the size of the U.S. military.

Not everyone wanted the government to reduce America's military might, however. Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal and Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson warned Truman in October 1945 that an overly rapid demobilization jeopardized the nation's strategic position in the world. While Truman agreed with their assessment, he felt powerless to put a halt to demobilization. In response to mounting political pressure, the government reduced the size of the U.S. military from a high of 12 million in June 1945 to 1.5 million in June 1947—still more troops than the nation ever had in arms during peacetime. Soldiers and sailors were not the only ones dismissed from service. As the war drew to a close, millions of women working the jobs of men who had gone off to fight were dismissed by their employers, often because the demand for war materiel had declined and because government propaganda encouraged them to go home to make way for the returning troops. While most women workers surveyed at the end of the war wished to keep their jobs (75–90 percent, depending on the study), many did in fact leave them. Nevertheless, throughout the late 1940s and the 1950s, women continued to make up approximately one-third of the U.S. labor force.

Readjustment to postwar life was difficult for the returning troops. The U.S. Army estimated that as many of 20 percent of its casualties were psychological. Although many eagerly awaited their return to civilian status, others feared that they would not be able to resume a humdrum existence after the experience of fighting on the front lines. Veterans also worried that they wouldn't find work and that civilian defense workers were better positioned to take advantage of the new jobs opening up in the peacetime economy. Some felt that their wives and children would not welcome their presence, and some children did indeed resent the return of fathers who threatened to disrupt the mother-child household. Those on the home front worried as well. Doctors warned fiancées, wives, and mothers that soldiers might return with psychological problems that would make them difficult to live with.

The GI Bill of Rights

Well before the end of the war, Congress had passed one of the most significant and far-reaching pieces of legislation to ease veterans' transition into civilian life: the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, also known as the **GI Bill (Figure 28.3)**. Every honorably discharged veteran who had seen active duty, but not necessarily combat, was eligible to receive a year's worth of unemployment compensation. This provision not only calmed veterans' fears regarding their ability to support themselves, but it also prevented large numbers of men—as well as some women—from suddenly entering a job market that did not have enough positions for them. Another way that the GI Bill averted a glut in the labor market was by giving returning veterans the opportunity to pursue an education; it paid for tuition at a college or vocational school, and gave them a stipend to live on while they completed their studies.



Figure 28.3 President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, or GI Bill, on June 22, 1944, just weeks after the Allied invasion of Normandy, France, and more than a year before the end of the war.

The result was a dramatic increase in the number of students—especially male ones—enrolled in American colleges and universities. In 1940, only 5.5 percent of American men had a college degree. By 1950, that percentage had increased to 7.3 percent, as more than two million servicemen took advantage of the benefits offered by the GI Bill to complete college. The numbers continued to grow throughout the 1950s. Upon graduation, these men were prepared for skilled blue-collar or white-collar jobs that paved the way for many to enter the middle class. The creation of a well-educated, skilled labor force helped the U.S. economy as well. Other benefits offered by the GI Bill included low-interest loans to purchase homes or start small businesses.

However, not all veterans were able to take advantage of the GI Bill. African American veterans could use their educational benefits only to attend schools that accepted black students. The approximately nine thousand servicemen and women who were dishonorably discharged because they were gay or lesbian were ineligible for GI Bill benefits. Benefits for some Mexican American veterans, mainly in Texas, were also denied or delayed.

The Return of the Japanese

While most veterans received assistance to help in their adjustment to postwar life, others returned home to an uncertain future without the promise of government aid to help them resume their prewar lives. Japanese Americans from the West Coast who had been interned during the war also confronted the task of rebuilding their lives. In December 1944, Franklin Roosevelt had declared an end to the forced relocation of Japanese Americans, and as of January 1945, they were free to return to their homes. In many areas, however, neighbors clung to their prejudices and denounced those of Japanese descent as disloyal and dangerous. These feelings had been worsened by wartime propaganda, which often featured horrific accounts of Japanese mistreatment of prisoners, and by the statements of military officers to the effect that the Japanese were inherently savage. Facing such animosity, many Japanese American families chose to move elsewhere. Those who did return often found that in their absence, “friends” and neighbors had sold possessions that had been left with them for safekeeping. Many homes had been vandalized and farms destroyed. When Japanese Americans reopened their businesses, former customers sometimes boycotted them.

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For more on the **experiences of Japanese Americans** (<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15JapaneseOR>) after internment, read about their return to communities in Oregon after World War II.

THE FAIR DEAL

Early in his presidency, Truman sought to build on the promises of Roosevelt's New Deal. Besides demobilizing the armed forces and preparing for the homecoming of servicemen and women, he also had to guide the nation through the process of returning to a peacetime economy. To this end, he proposed an ambitious program of social legislation that included establishing a federal minimum wage, expanding Social Security and public housing, and prohibiting child labor. Wartime price controls were retained for some items but removed from others, like meat. In his 1949 inaugural address, Truman referred to his programs as the "**Fair Deal**," a nod to his predecessor's New Deal. He wanted the Fair Deal to include Americans of color and became the first president to address the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He also took decisive steps towards extending civil rights to African Americans by establishing, by executive order in December 1946, a Presidential Committee on Civil Rights to investigate racial discrimination in the United States. Truman also desegregated the armed forces, again by executive order, in July 1948, overriding many objections that the military was no place for social experimentation.

Congress, however, which was dominated by Republicans and southern conservative Democrats, refused to pass more "radical" pieces of legislation, such as a bill providing for national healthcare. The American Medical Association spent some \$1.5 million to defeat Truman's healthcare proposal, which it sought to discredit as socialized medicine in order to appeal to Americans' fear of Communism. The same Congress also refused to make lynching a federal crime or outlaw the poll tax that reduced the access of poor Americans to the ballot box. Congress also rejected a bill that would have made Roosevelt's Fair Employment Practices Committee, which prohibited racial discrimination by companies doing business with the federal government, permanent. At the same time, they passed many conservative pieces of legislation. For example, the Taft-Hartley Act, which limited the power of unions, became law despite Truman's veto.

28.2 The Cold War

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain how and why the Cold War emerged in the wake of World War II
- Describe the steps taken by the U.S. government to oppose Communist expansion in Europe and Asia
- Discuss the government's efforts to root out Communist influences in the United States

As World War II drew to a close, the alliance that had made the United States and the Soviet Union partners in their defeat of the Axis powers—Germany, Italy, and Japan—began to fall apart. Both sides realized that their visions for the future of Europe and the world were incompatible. Joseph Stalin, the

premier of the Soviet Union, wished to retain hold of Eastern Europe and establish Communist, pro-Soviet governments there, in an effort to both expand Soviet influence and protect the Soviet Union from future invasions. He also sought to bring Communist revolution to Asia and to developing nations elsewhere in the world. The United States wanted to expand its influence as well by protecting or installing democratic governments throughout the world. It sought to combat the influence of the Soviet Union by forming alliances with Asian, African, and Latin American nations, and by helping these countries to establish or expand prosperous, free-market economies. The end of the war left the industrialized nations of Europe and Asia physically devastated and economically exhausted by years of invasion, battle, and bombardment. With Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and China reduced to shadows of their former selves, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the last two superpowers and quickly found themselves locked in a contest for military, economic, social, technological, and ideological supremacy.

FROM ISOLATIONISM TO ENGAGEMENT

The United States had a long history of avoiding foreign alliances that might require the commitment of its troops abroad. However, in accepting the realities of the post-World War II world, in which traditional powers like Great Britain or France were no longer strong enough to police the globe, the United States realized that it would have to make a permanent change in its foreign policy, shifting from relative isolation to active engagement.

On assuming the office of president upon the death of Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman was already troubled by Soviet actions in Europe. He disliked the concessions made by Roosevelt at Yalta, which had allowed the Soviet Union to install a Communist government in Poland. At the Potsdam conference, held from July 17 to August 2, 1945, Truman also opposed Stalin's plans to demand large reparations from Germany. He feared the burden that this would impose on Germany might lead to another cycle of German rearmament and aggression—a fear based on that nation's development after World War I (**Figure 28.4**).



Figure 28.4 At the postwar conference in Potsdam, Germany, Harry Truman stands between Joseph Stalin (right) and Clement Attlee (left). Attlee became prime minister of Great Britain, replacing Winston Churchill, while the conference was taking place.

Although the United States and the Soviet Union did finally reach an agreement at Potsdam, this was the final occasion on which they cooperated for quite some time. Each remained convinced that its own economic and political systems were superior to the other's, and the two superpowers quickly found themselves drawn into conflict. The decades-long struggle between them for technological and ideological supremacy became known as the **Cold War**. So called because it did not include direct military confrontation between Soviet and U.S. troops, the Cold War was fought with a variety of other weapons: espionage and surveillance, political assassinations, propaganda, and the formation of alliances with other

nations. It also became an arms race, as both countries competed to build the greatest stockpile of nuclear weapons, and also competed for influence in poorer nations, supporting opposite sides in wars in some of those nations, such as Korea and Vietnam.

CONTAINMENT ABROAD

In February 1946, George Kennan, a State Department official stationed at the U.S. embassy in Moscow, sent an eight-thousand-word message to Washington, DC. In what became known as the “Long Telegram,” Kennan maintained that Soviet leaders believed that the only way to protect the Soviet Union was to destroy “rival” nations and their influence over weaker nations. According to Kennan, the Soviet Union was not so much a revolutionary regime as a totalitarian bureaucracy that was unable to accept the prospect of a peaceful coexistence of the United States and itself. He advised that the best way to thwart Soviet plans for the world was to contain Soviet influence—primarily through economic policy—to those places where it already existed and prevent its political expansion into new areas. This strategy, which came to be known as the policy of **containment**, formed the basis for U.S. foreign policy and military decision making for more than thirty years.

As Communist governments came to power elsewhere in the world, American policymakers extended their strategy of containment to what became known as the **domino theory** under the Eisenhower administration: Neighbors to Communist nations, so was the assumption, were likely to succumb to the same allegedly dangerous and infectious ideology. Like dominos toppling one another, entire regions would eventually be controlled by the Soviets. The demand for anti-Communist containment appeared as early as March 1946 in a speech by Winston Churchill, in which he referred to an **Iron Curtain** that divided Europe into the “free” West and the Communist East controlled by the Soviet Union.

The commitment to containing Soviet expansion made necessary the ability to mount a strong military offense and defense. In pursuit of this goal, the U.S. military was reorganized under the National Security Act of 1947. This act streamlined the government in matters of security by creating the National Security Council and establishing the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to conduct surveillance and espionage in foreign nations. It also created the Department of the Air Force, which was combined with the Departments of the Army and Navy in 1949 to form one Department of Defense.

The Truman Doctrine

In Europe, the end of World War II witnessed the rise of a number of internal struggles for control of countries that had been occupied by Nazi Germany. Great Britain occupied Greece as the Nazi regime there collapsed. The British aided the authoritarian government of Greece in its battles against Greek Communists. In March 1947, Great Britain announced that it could no longer afford the cost of supporting government military activities and withdrew from participation in the Greek civil war. Stepping into this power vacuum, the United States announced the Truman Doctrine, which offered support to Greece and Turkey in the form of financial assistance, weaponry, and troops to help train their militaries and bolster their governments against Communism. Eventually, the program was expanded to include any state trying to withstand a Communist takeover. The Truman Doctrine thus became a hallmark of U.S. Cold War policy.

DEFINING "AMERICAN"

The Truman Doctrine

In 1947, Great Britain, which had assumed responsibility for the disarming of German troops in Greece at the end of World War II, could no longer afford to provide financial support for the authoritarian Greek government, which was attempting to win a civil war against Greek leftist rebels. President Truman, unwilling to allow a Communist government to come to power there, requested Congress to provide funds for the government of Greece to continue its fight against the rebels. Truman also requested aid for the government of Turkey to fight the forces of Communism in that country. He said:

At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one.

Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East.

The seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want. They spread and grow in the evil soil of poverty and strife. They reach their full growth when the hope of a people for a better life has died. We must keep that hope alive.

The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms.

If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world—and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own nation.

Great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events.

I am confident that the Congress will face these responsibilities squarely.

What role is Truman suggesting that the United States assume in the postwar world? Does the United States still assume this role?

The Marshall Plan

By 1946, the American economy was growing significantly. At the same time, the economic situation in Europe was disastrous. The war had turned much of Western Europe into a battlefield, and the rebuilding of factories, public transportation systems, and power stations progressed exceedingly slowly. Starvation loomed as a real possibility for many. As a result of these conditions, Communism was making significant inroads in both Italy and France. These concerns led Truman, along with Secretary of State George C. Marshall, to propose to Congress the European Recovery Program, popularly known as the **Marshall Plan**. Between its implantation in April 1948 and its termination in 1951, this program gave \$13 billion in economic aid to European nations.

Truman's motivation was economic and political, as well as humanitarian. The plan stipulated that the European nations had to work together in order to receive aid, thus enforcing unity through enticement, while seeking to undercut the political popularity of French and Italian Communists and dissuading moderates from forming coalition governments with them. Likewise, much of the money had to be spent on American goods, boosting the postwar economy of the United States as well as the American cultural presence in Europe. Stalin regarded the program as a form of bribery. The Soviet Union refused to accept aid from the Marshall Plan, even though it could have done so, and forbade the Communist states of Eastern Europe to accept U.S. funds as well. Those states that did accept aid began to experience an economic recovery.

MY STORY

George C. Marshall and the Nobel Peace Prize

The youngest child of a Pennsylvania businessman and Democrat, George C. Marshall (**Figure 28.5**) chose a military career. He attended the Virginia Military Institute, was a veteran of World War I, and spent the rest of his life either in the military or otherwise in the service of his country, including as President Truman's Secretary of State. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953, the only soldier to ever receive that honor. Below is an excerpt of his remarks as he accepted the award.



Figure 28.5 During World War II, George C. Marshall was responsible for expanding the 189,000-member U.S. Army into a modern, fighting force of eight million by 1942. As Secretary of State under Truman, he proposed the European Recovery Program to aid European economies struggling after the war.

There has been considerable comment over the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to a soldier. I am afraid this does not seem as remarkable to me as it quite evidently appears to others. I know a great deal of the horrors and tragedies of war. Today, as chairman of the American Battle Monuments Commission, it is my duty to supervise the construction and maintenance of military cemeteries in many countries overseas, particularly in Western Europe. The cost of war in human lives is constantly spread before me, written neatly in many ledgers whose columns are gravestones. I am deeply moved to find some means or method of avoiding another calamity of war. Almost daily I hear from the wives, or mothers, or families of the fallen. The tragedy of the aftermath is almost constantly before me.

I share with you an active concern for some practical method for avoiding war. . . . A very strong military posture is vitally necessary today. How long it must continue I am not prepared to estimate, but I am sure that it is too narrow a basis on which to build a dependable, long-enduring peace. The guarantee for a long continued peace will depend on other factors in addition to a moderated military strength, and no less important. Perhaps the most important single factor will be a spiritual regeneration to develop goodwill, faith, and understanding among nations. Economic factors will undoubtedly play an important part. Agreements to secure a balance of power, however disagreeable they may seem, must likewise be considered. And with all these there must be wisdom and the will to act on that wisdom.

What steps did Marshall recommend be taken to maintain a lasting peace? To what extent have today's nations heeded his advice?

Showdown in Europe

The lack of consensus with the Soviets on the future of Germany led the United States, Great Britain, and France to support joining their respective occupation zones into a single, independent state. In December 1946, they took steps to do so, but the Soviet Union did not wish the western zones of the country to unify under a democratic, pro-capitalist government. The Soviet Union also feared the possibility of a unified West Berlin, located entirely within the Soviet sector. Three days after the western allies authorized the introduction of a new currency in Western Germany—the Deutsche Mark—Stalin ordered all land and water routes to the western zones of the city Berlin to be cut off in June 1948. Hoping to starve the western parts of the city into submission, the Berlin blockade was also a test of the emerging U.S. policy of containment.

Unwilling to abandon Berlin, the United States, Great Britain, and France began to deliver all needed supplies to West Berlin by air (**Figure 28.6**). In April 1949, the three countries joined Canada and eight Western European nations to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an alliance pledging its members to mutual defense in the event of attack. On May 12, 1949, a year and approximately two million tons of supplies later, the Soviets admitted defeat and ended the blockade of Berlin. On May 23, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), consisting of the unified western zones and commonly referred to as West Germany, was formed. The Soviets responded by creating the German Democratic Republic, or East Germany, in October 1949.



Figure 28.6 American C-47 transport planes (a) are loaded with staged supplies at a French airport before taking off for Berlin. Residents of Berlin wait for a U.S. plane (b) carrying needed supplies to land at Templehof Airport in the American sector of the city.

CONTAINMENT AT HOME

In 1949, two incidents severely disrupted American confidence in the ability of the United States to contain the spread of Communism and limit Soviet power in the world. First, on August 29, 1949, the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb—no longer did the United States have a monopoly on nuclear power. A few months later, on October 1, 1949, Chinese Communist Party leader Mao Zedong announced the triumph of the Chinese Communists over their Nationalist foes in a civil war that had been raging since 1927. The Nationalist forces, under their leader Chiang Kai-shek, departed for Taiwan in December 1949.

Immediately, there were suspicions that spies had passed bomb-making secrets to the Soviets and that Communist sympathizers in the U.S. State Department had hidden information that might have enabled the United States to ward off the Communist victory in China. Indeed, in February 1950, Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy, a Republican, charged in a speech that the State Department was filled with Communists. Also in 1950, the imprisonment in Great Britain of Klaus Fuchs, a German-born physicist who had worked on the Manhattan Project and was then convicted of passing nuclear secrets to the Soviets, increased American fears. Information given by Fuchs to the British implicated a number of

American citizens as well. The most infamous trial of suspected American spies was that of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were executed in June 1953 despite a lack of evidence against them. Several decades later, evidence was found that Julius, but not Ethel, had in fact given information to the Soviet Union.

Fears that Communists within the United States were jeopardizing the country's security had existed even before the victory of Mao Zedong and the arrest and conviction of the atomic spies. Roosevelt's New Deal and Truman's Fair Deal were often criticized as "socialist," which many mistakenly associated with Communism, and Democrats were often branded Communists by Republicans. In response, on March 21, 1947, Truman signed Executive Order 9835, which provided the Federal Bureau of Investigation with broad powers to investigate federal employees and identify potential security risks. State and municipal governments instituted their own loyalty boards to find and dismiss potentially disloyal workers.

In addition to loyalty review boards, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), established in 1938 to investigate suspected Nazi sympathizers, after World War II also sought to root out suspected Communists in business, academia, and the media. HUAC was particularly interested in Hollywood because it feared that Communist sympathizers might use motion pictures as pro-Soviet propaganda. Witnesses were subpoenaed and required to testify before the committee; refusal could result in imprisonment. Those who invoked Fifth Amendment protections, or were otherwise suspected of Communist sympathies, often lost their jobs or found themselves on a **blacklist**, which prevented them from securing employment. Notable artists who were blacklisted in the 1940s and 1950s include composer Leonard Bernstein, novelist Dashiell Hammett, playwright and screenwriter Lillian Hellman, actor and singer Paul Robeson, and musician Artie Shaw.

TO THE TRENCHES AGAIN

Just as the U.S. government feared the possibility of Communist infiltration of the United States, so too was it alert for signs that Communist forces were on the move elsewhere. The Soviet Union had been granted control of the northern half of the Korean peninsula at the end of World War II, and the United States had control of the southern portion. The Soviets displayed little interest in extending its power into South Korea, and Stalin did not wish to risk confrontation with the United States over Korea. North Korea's leaders, however, wished to reunify the peninsula under Communist rule. In April 1950, Stalin finally gave permission to North Korea's leader Kim Il Sung to invade South Korea and provided the North Koreans with weapons and military advisors.

On June 25, 1950, troops of the North Korean People's Democratic Army crossed the thirty-eighth parallel, the border between North and South Korea. The first major test of the U.S. policy of containment in Asia had begun, for the domino theory held that a victory by North Korea might lead to further Communist expansion in Asia, in the virtual backyard of the United States' chief new ally in East Asia—Japan. The United Nations (UN), which had been established in 1945, was quick to react. On June 27, the UN Security Council denounced North Korea's actions and called upon UN members to help South Korea defeat the invading forces. As a permanent member of the Security Council, the Soviet Union could have vetoed the action, but it had boycotted UN meetings following the awarding of China's seat on the Security Council to Taiwan instead of to Mao Zedong's People's Republic of China.

On June 27, Truman ordered U.S. military forces into South Korea. They established a defensive line on the far southern part of the Korean peninsula near the town of Pusan. A U.S.-led invasion at Inchon on September 15 halted the North Korean advance and turned it into a retreat (**Figure 28.7**). As North Korean forces moved back across the thirty-eighth parallel, UN forces under the command of U.S. General Douglas MacArthur followed. MacArthur's goal was not only to drive the North Korean army out of South Korea but to destroy Communist North Korea as well. At this stage, he had the support of President Truman; however, as UN forces approached the Yalu River, the border between China and North Korea, MacArthur's and Truman's objectives diverged. Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, who had provided supplies and military advisors for North Korea before the conflict began, sent troops into battle to support North Korea and caught U.S. troops by surprise. Following a costly retreat from North Korea's Chosin Reservoir,

a swift advance of Chinese and North Korean forces and another invasion of Seoul, MacArthur urged Truman to deploy nuclear weapons against China. Truman, however, did not wish to risk a broader war in Asia. MacArthur criticized Truman's decision and voiced his disagreement in a letter to a Republican congressman, who subsequently allowed the letter to become public. In April 1951, Truman accused MacArthur of insubordination and relieved him of his command. The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed, calling the escalation MacArthur had called for "the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy." Nonetheless, the public gave MacArthur a hero's welcome in New York with the largest ticker tape parade in the nation's history.

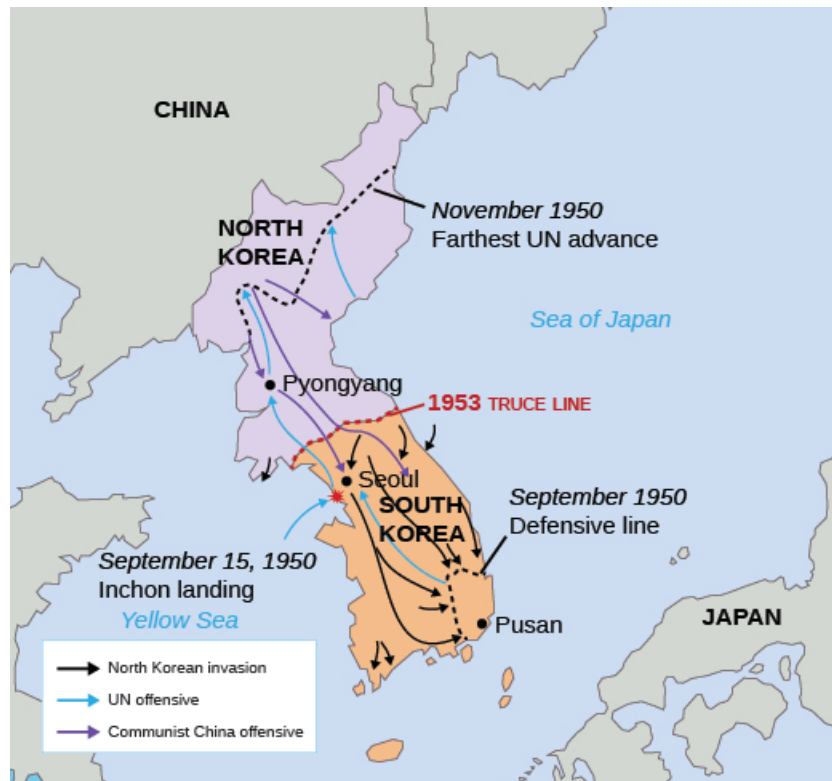


Figure 28.7 After the initial invasion of South Korea by the North Korean People's Democratic Army, the United Nations established a defensive line in the southern part of the country. The landing at Inchon in September reversed the tide of the war and allowed UN forces under General Douglas MacArthur to retake the city of Seoul, which had fallen to North Korean troops in the early days of the war.

By July 1951, the UN forces had recovered from the setbacks earlier in the year and pushed North Korean and Chinese forces back across the thirty-eighth parallel, and peace talks began. However, combat raged on for more than two additional years. The primary source of contention was the fate of prisoners of war. The Chinese and North Koreans insisted that their prisoners be returned to them, but many of these men did not wish to be repatriated. Finally, an armistice agreement was signed on July 27, 1953. A border between North and South Korea, one quite close to the original thirty-eighth parallel line, was agreed upon. A demilitarized zone between the two nations was established, and both sides agreed that prisoners of war would be allowed to choose whether to be returned to their homelands. Five million people died in the three-year conflict. Of these, around 36,500 were U.S. soldiers; a majority were Korean civilians.

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As the war in Korea came to an end, so did one of the most frightening anti-Communist campaigns in the United States. After charging the U.S. State Department with harboring Communists, Senator Joseph McCarthy had continued to make similar accusations against other government agencies. Prominent Republicans like Senator Robert Taft and Congressman Richard Nixon regarded McCarthy as an asset who targeted Democratic politicians, and they supported his actions. In 1953, as chair of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, McCarthy investigated the Voice of America, which broadcast news and pro-U.S. propaganda to foreign countries, and the State Department's overseas libraries. After an aborted effort to investigate Protestant clergy, McCarthy turned his attention to the U.S. Army. This proved to be the end of the senator's political career. From April to June 1954, the Army-McCarthy Hearings were televised, and the American public, able to witness his use of intimidation and innuendo firsthand, rejected McCarthy's approach to rooting out Communism in the United States (**Figure 28.8**). In December 1954, the U.S. Senate officially condemned his actions with a censure, ending his prospects for political leadership.



Figure 28.8 Senator Joseph McCarthy (left) consults with Roy Cohn (right) during the Army-McCarthy hearings. Cohn, a lawyer who worked for McCarthy, was responsible for investigating State Department libraries overseas for "subversive" books.

One particularly heinous aspect of the hunt for Communists in the United States, likened by playwright Arthur Miller to the witch hunts of old, was its effort to root out gay men and lesbians employed by the government. Many anti-Communists, including McCarthy, believed that gay men, referred to by Senator Everett Dirksen as "lavender lads," were morally weak and thus were particularly likely to betray their country. Many also believed that lesbians and gay men were prone to being blackmailed by Soviet agents because of their sexual orientation, which at the time was regarded by psychiatrists as a form of mental illness.

28.3 The American Dream

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe President Dwight D. Eisenhower's domestic and foreign policies
- Discuss gender roles in the 1950s
- Discuss the growth of the suburbs and the effect of suburbanization on American society

Against the backdrop of the Cold War, Americans dedicated themselves to building a peaceful and prosperous society after the deprivation and instability of the Great Depression and World War II. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the general who led the United States to victory in Europe in 1945, proved to be the perfect president for the new era. Lacking strong conservative positions, he steered a middle path between conservatism and liberalism, and presided over a peacetime decade of economic growth and social conformity. In foreign affairs, Eisenhower's New Look policy simultaneously expanded the nation's nuclear arsenal and prevented the expansion of the defense budget for conventional forces.

WE LIKE IKE

After Harry Truman declined to run again for the presidency, the election of 1952 emerged as a contest between the Democratic nominee, Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson, and Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had directed American forces in Europe during World War II (**Figure 28.9**). Eisenhower campaigned largely on a promise to end the war in Korea, a conflict the public had grown weary of fighting. He also vowed to fight Communism both at home and abroad, a commitment he demonstrated by choosing as his running mate Richard M. Nixon, a congressman who had made a name for himself by pursuing Communists, notably former State Department employee and suspected Soviet agent Alger Hiss.



Figure 28.9 Dwight D. Eisenhower was the perfect presidential candidate in 1952. He had never before run for office or even cast a vote, and thus had no political record to be challenged or criticized.

In 1952, Eisenhower supporters enthusiastically proclaimed “We Like Ike,” and Eisenhower defeated Stevenson by winning 54 percent of the popular vote and 87 percent of the electoral vote (**Figure 28.10**). When he assumed office in 1953, Eisenhower employed a leadership style he had developed during his years of military service. He was calm and willing to delegate authority regarding domestic affairs to his cabinet members, allowing him to focus his own efforts on foreign policy. Unlike many earlier presidents, such as Harry Truman, Eisenhower was largely nonpartisan and consistently sought a middle

ground between liberalism and conservatism. He strove to balance the federal budget, which appealed to conservative Republicans, but retained much of the New Deal and even expanded Social Security. He maintained high levels of defense spending but, in his farewell speech in 1961, warned about the growth of the **military-industrial complex**, the matrix of relationships between officials in the Department of Defense and executives in the defense industry who all benefited from increases in defense spending. He disliked the tactics of Joseph McCarthy but did not oppose him directly, preferring to remain above the fray. He saw himself as a leader called upon to do his best for his country, not as a politician engaged in a contest for advantage over rivals.

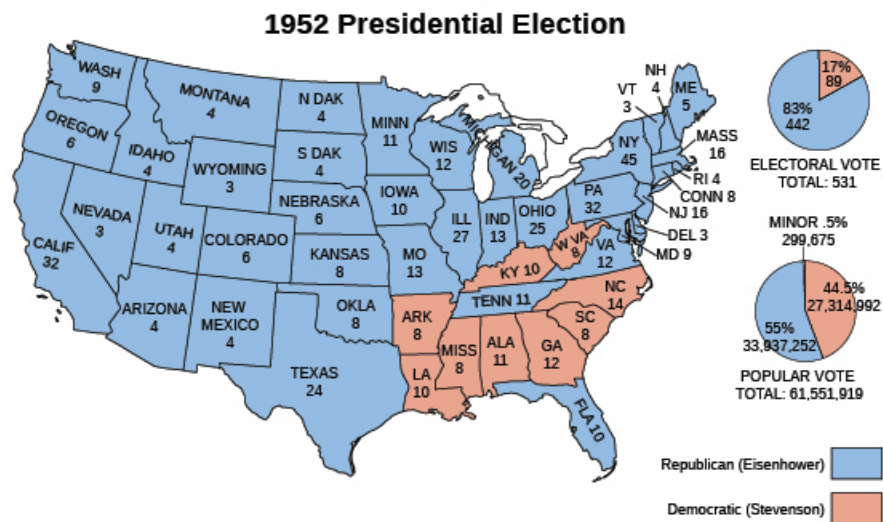


Figure 28.10 The above map shows the resounding victory of Dwight D. Eisenhower over Adlai Stevenson in the 1952 election. Stevenson carried only the South, where whites had voted for Democratic Party candidates since the time of the Civil War.

In keeping with his goal of a balanced budget, Eisenhower switched the emphasis in defense from larger conventional forces to greater stockpiles of nuclear weapons. His New Look strategy embraced nuclear “**massive retaliation**,” a plan for nuclear response to a first Soviet strike so devastating that the attackers would not be able to respond. Some labeled this approach “Mutually Assured Destruction” or MAD.

Part of preparing for a possible war with the Soviet Union was informing the American public what to do in the event of a nuclear attack. The government provided instructions for building and equipping bomb shelters in the basement or backyard, and some cities constructed municipal shelters. Schools purchased dog tags to help identify students in the aftermath of an attack and showed children instructional films telling them what to do if atomic bombs were dropped on the city where they lived.

AMERICANA

“A Guide for Surviving Nuclear War”

To prepare its citizens for the possibility of nuclear war, in 1950, the U.S. government published and distributed informative pamphlets such as “A Guide for Surviving Nuclear War” excerpted here.

Just like fire bombs and ordinary high explosives, atomic weapons cause most of their death and damage by blast and heat. So first let's look at a few things you can do to escape these two dangers.

Even if you have only a second's warning, there is one important thing you can do to lessen your chances of injury by blast: Fall flat on your face.

More than half of all wounds are the result of being bodily tossed about or being struck by falling and flying objects. If you lie down flat, you are least likely to be thrown about. If you have time to pick a good spot, there is less chance of your being struck by flying glass and other things.

If you are inside a building, the best place to flatten out is close against the cellar wall. If you haven't time to get down there, lie down along an inside wall, or duck under a bed or table. . .

If caught out-of-doors, either drop down alongside the base of a good substantial building—avoid flimsy, wooden ones likely to be blown over on top of you—or else jump in any handy ditch or gutter.

When you fall flat to protect yourself from a bombing, don't look up to see what is coming. Even during the daylight hours, the flash from a bursting A-bomb can cause several moments of blindness, if you're facing that way. To prevent it, bury your face in your arms and hold it there for 10 to 12 seconds after the explosion. . . .

If you work in the open, always wear full-length, loose-fitting, light-colored clothes in time of emergency. Never go around with your sleeves rolled up. Always wear a hat—the brim could save you a serious face burn.

What do you think was the purpose of these directions? Do you think they could actually help people survive an atomic bomb blast? If not, why publish such booklets?

Click and Explore



View this **short instructional film** (<http://openstaxcollege.org//15DuckCover>) made in 1951 that teaches elementary school children what to do in the event an atomic bomb is dropped. Why do you think officials tried to convey the message that a nuclear attack was survivable?

Government and industry allocated enormous amounts of money to the research and development of more powerful weapons. This investment generated rapid strides in missile technology as well as increasingly sensitive radar. Computers that could react more quickly than humans and thereby shoot down speeding missiles were also investigated. Many scientists on both sides of the Cold War, including captured Germans such as rocket engineer Werner von Braun, worked on these devices. An early success for the West came in 1950, when Alan Turing, a British mathematician who had broken Germany's Enigma code during World War II, created a machine that mimicked human thought. His discoveries led scientists to consider the possibility of developing true artificial intelligence.

However, the United States often feared that the Soviets were making greater strides in developing technology with potential military applications. This was especially true following the Soviet Union's launch of *Sputnik* (**Figure 28.11**), the first manmade satellite, in October 1957. In September 1958, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act, which pumped over \$775 million into educational programs over four years, especially those programs that focused on math and science. Congressional appropriations to the National Science Foundation also increased by \$100 million in a single year, from \$34 million in 1958 to \$134 million in 1959. One consequence of this increased funding was the growth of science and engineering programs at American universities.

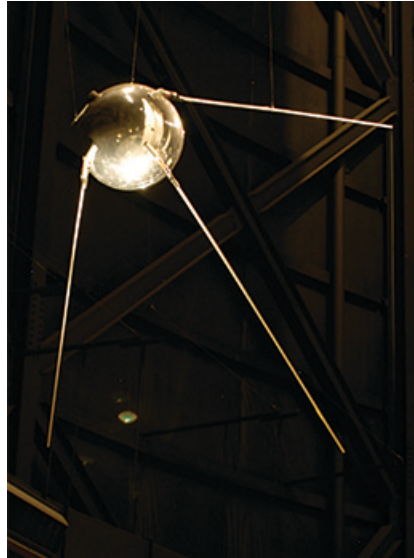


Figure 28.11 The launch of the Soviet satellite *Sputnik* frightened many in the United States, who feared that Soviet technology had surpassed their own. To calm these fears, Americans domesticated *Sputnik*, creating children's games based on it and using its shape as a decorative motif.

In the diplomatic sphere, Eisenhower pushed Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to take a firmer stance against the Soviets to reassure European allies of continued American support. At the same time, keenly sensing that the stalemate in Korea had cost Truman his popularity, Eisenhower worked to avoid being drawn into foreign wars. Thus, when the French found themselves fighting Vietnamese Communists for control of France's former colony of Indochina, Eisenhower provided money but not troops. Likewise, the United States took no steps when Hungary attempted to break away from Soviet domination in 1956. The United States also refused to be drawn in when Great Britain, France, and Israel invaded the Suez Canal Zone following Egypt's nationalization of the canal in 1956. Indeed, Eisenhower, wishing to avoid conflict with the Soviet Union, threatened to impose economic sanctions on the invading countries if they did not withdraw.

SUBURBANIZATION

Although the Eisenhower years were marked by fear of the Soviet Union and its military might, they were also a time of peace and prosperity. Even as many Americans remained mired in poverty, many others with limited economic opportunities, like African Americans or union workers, were better off financially in the 1950s and rose into the ranks of the middle class. Wishing to build the secure life that the Great Depression had deprived their parents of, young men and women married in record numbers and purchased homes where they could start families of their own. In 1940, the rate of homeownership in the United States was 43.6 percent. By 1960, it was almost 62 percent. Many of these newly purchased homes had been built in the new suburban areas that began to encircle American cities after the war. Although middle-class families had begun to move to the suburbs beginning in the nineteenth century, suburban growth accelerated rapidly after World War II.

Several factors contributed to this development. During World War II, the United States had suffered from a housing shortage, especially in cities with shipyards or large defense plants. Now that the war was over, real estate developers and contractors rushed to alleviate the scarcity. Unused land on the fringes of American cities provided the perfect place for new housing, which attracted not only the middle class, which had long sought homes outside the crowded cities, but also blue-collar workers who took advantage of the low-interest mortgages offered by the GI Bill.

An additional factor was the use of prefabricated construction techniques pioneered during World War II, which allowed houses complete with plumbing, electrical wiring, and appliances to be built and painted in a day. Employing these methods, developers built acres of inexpensive tract housing throughout the country. One of the first developers to take advantage of this method was William Levitt, who purchased farmland in Nassau County, Long Island, in 1947 and built thousands of prefabricated houses. The new community was named **Levittown**.

Levitt's houses cost only \$8,000 and could be bought with little or no down payment. The first day they were offered for sale, more than one thousand were purchased. Levitt went on to build similar developments, also called Levittown, in New Jersey and Pennsylvania (**Figure 28.12**). As developers around the country rushed to emulate him, the name Levittown became synonymous with suburban tract housing, in which entire neighborhoods were built to either a single plan or a mere handful of designs. The houses were so similar that workers told of coming home late at night and walking into the wrong one. Levittown homes were similar in other ways as well; most were owned by white families. Levitt used restrictive language in his agreements with potential homeowners to ensure that only whites would live in his communities.



Figure 28.12 This aerial view of Levittown, Pennsylvania, reveals acres of standardized homes. The roads were curved to prevent cars from speeding through the residential community that was home to many young families.

In the decade between 1950 and 1960, the suburbs grew by 46 percent. The transition from urban to suburban life exerted profound effects on both the economy and society. For example, fifteen of the largest U.S. cities saw their tax bases shrink significantly in the postwar period, and the apportionment of seats in the House of Representatives shifted to the suburbs and away from urban areas.

The development of the suburbs also increased reliance on the automobile for transportation. Suburban men drove to work in nearby cities or, when possible, were driven to commuter rail stations by their wives. In the early years of suburban development, before schools, parks, and supermarkets were built, access to an automobile was crucial, and the pressure on families to purchase a second one was strong. As families rushed to purchase them, the annual production of passenger cars leaped from 2.2 million to 8 million between 1946 and 1955, and by 1960, about 20 percent of suburban families owned two cars. The growing number of cars on the road changed consumption patterns, and drive-in and drive-through convenience

stores, restaurants, and movie theaters began to dot the landscape. The first McDonalds opened in San Bernardino, California, in 1954 to cater to drivers in a hurry.

As drivers jammed highways and small streets in record numbers, cities and states rushed to build additional roadways and ease congestion. To help finance these massive construction efforts, states began taxing gasoline, and the federal government provided hundreds of thousands of dollars for the construction of the interstate highway system (**Figure 28.13**). The resulting construction projects, designed to make it easier for suburbanites to commute to and from cities, often destroyed urban working-class neighborhoods. Increased funding for highway construction also left less money for public transportation, making it impossible for those who could not afford automobiles to live in the suburbs.



Figure 28.13 In the late 1940s, a network of newly constructed highways connected suburban Long Island with Manhattan. The nation's new road network also served a military purpose; interstate highways made it easier to deploy troops in the event of a national emergency.

THE ORGANIZATION MAN

As the government poured money into the defense industry and into universities that conducted research for the government, the economy boomed. The construction and automobile industries employed thousands, as did the industries they relied upon: steel, oil and gasoline refining, rubber, and lumber. As people moved into new homes, their purchases of appliances, carpeting, furniture, and home decorations spurred growth in other industries. The building of miles of roads also employed thousands. Unemployment was low, and wages for members of both the working and middle classes were high.

Following World War II, the majority of white Americans were members of the middle class, based on such criteria as education, income, and home ownership. Even most blue-collar families could afford such elements of a middle-class lifestyle as new cars, suburban homes, and regular vacations. Most African Americans, however, were not members of the middle class. In 1950, the median income for white families was \$20,656, whereas for black families it was \$11,203. By 1960, when the average white family earned \$28,485 a year, blacks still lagged behind at \$15,786; nevertheless, this represented a more than 40 percent increase in African American income in the space of a decade.

While working-class men found jobs in factories and on construction crews, those in the middle class often worked for corporations that, as a result of government spending, had grown substantially during World War II and were still getting larger. Such corporations, far too large to allow managers to form personal relationships with all of their subordinates, valued conformity to company rules and standards above all else. In his best-selling book *The Organization Man*, however, William H. Whyte criticized the notion that conformity was the best path to success and self-fulfillment.

Conformity was still the watchword of suburban life: Many neighborhoods had rules mandating what types of clotheslines could be used and prohibited residents from parking their cars on the street. Above all, conforming to societal norms meant marrying young and having children. In the post-World War II period, marriage rates rose; the average age at first marriage dropped to twenty-three for men and twenty for women. Between 1946 and 1964, married couples also gave birth to the largest generation in U.S. history to date; this **baby boom** resulted in the cohort known as the baby boomers. Conformity also required that the wives of both working- and middle-class men stay home and raise children instead of working for wages outside the home. Most conformed to this norm, at least while their children were young. Nevertheless, 40 percent of women with young children and half of women with older children sought at least part-time employment. They did so partly out of necessity and partly to pay for the new elements of “the good life”—second cars, vacations, and college education for their children.

The children born during the baby boom were members of a more privileged generation than their parents had been. Entire industries sprang up to cater to their need for clothing, toys, games, books, and breakfast cereals. For the first time in U.S. history, attending high school was an experience shared by the majority, regardless of race or region. As the baby boomers grew into adolescence, marketers realized that they not only controlled large amounts of disposable income earned at part-time jobs, but they exerted a great deal of influence over their parents’ purchases as well. Madison Avenue began to appeal to teenage interests. Boys yearned for cars, and girls of all ethnicities wanted boyfriends who had them. New fashion magazines for adolescent girls, such as *Seventeen*, advertised the latest clothing and cosmetics, and teen romance magazines, like *Copper Romance*, a publication for young African American women, filled drugstore racks. The music and movie industries also altered their products to appeal to affluent adolescents who were growing tired of parental constraints.

28.4 Popular Culture and Mass Media

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe Americans’ different responses to rock and roll music
- Discuss the way contemporary movies and television reflected postwar American society

With a greater generational consciousness than previous generations, the baby boomers sought to define and redefine their identities in numerous ways. Music, especially rock and roll, reflected their desire to rebel against adult authority. Other forms of popular culture, such as movies and television, sought to entertain, while reinforcing values such as religious faith, patriotism, and conformity to societal norms.

ROCKING AROUND THE CLOCK

In the late 1940s, some white country musicians began to experiment with the rhythms of the blues, a decades-old musical genre of rural southern blacks. This experimentation led to the creation of a new musical form known as rockabilly, and by the 1950s, rockabilly had developed into **rock and roll**. Rock and roll music celebrated themes such as young love and freedom from the oppression of middle-class society. It quickly grew in favor among American teens, thanks largely to the efforts of disc jockey Alan Freed, who named and popularized the music by playing it on the radio in Cleveland, where he also organized the first rock and roll concert, and later in New York.

The theme of rebellion against authority, present in many rock and roll songs, appealed to teens. In 1954, Bill Haley and His Comets provided youth with an anthem for their rebellion—“Rock Around the Clock” (**Figure 28.14**). The song, used in the 1955 movie *Blackboard Jungle* about a white teacher at a troubled inner-city high school, seemed to be calling for teens to declare their independence from adult control.

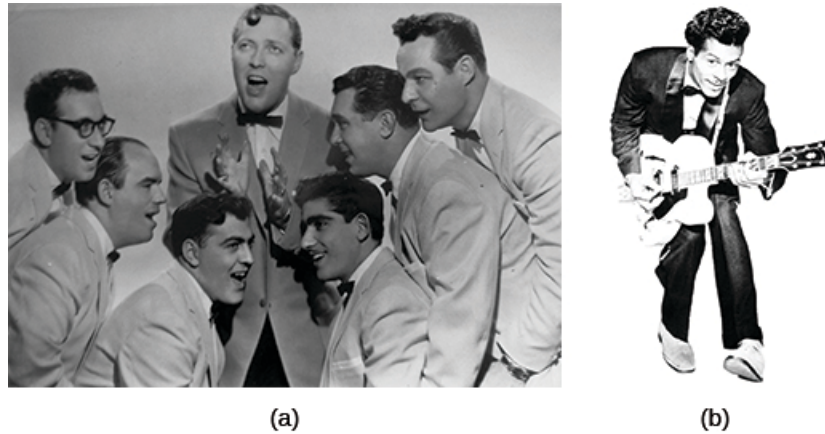


Figure 28.14 The band Bill Haley and His Comets (a) was among the first to launch the new genre of rock and roll. Their hit song “Rock Around the Clock” supposedly caused some teens to break into violent behavior when they heard it. Chuck Berry (b) was a performer who combined rhythm and blues and rock and roll. He dazzled crowds with guitar solos and electrifying performances.

Haley illustrated how white artists could take musical motifs from the African American community and achieve mainstream success. Teen heartthrob Elvis Presley rose to stardom doing the same. Thus, besides encouraging a feeling of youthful rebellion, rock and roll also began to tear down color barriers, as white youths sought out African American musicians such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard (**Figure 28.14**).

While youth had found an outlet for their feelings and concerns, parents were much less enthused about rock and roll and the values it seemed to promote. Many regarded the music as a threat to American values. When Elvis Presley appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, a popular television variety program, the camera deliberately focused on his torso and did not show his swiveling hips or legs shaking in time to the music. Despite adults’ dislike of the genre, or perhaps because of it, more than 68 percent of the music played on the radio in 1956 was rock and roll.

HOLLYWOOD ON THE DEFENSIVE

At first, Hollywood encountered difficulties in adjusting to the post-World War II environment. Although domestic audiences reached a record high in 1946 and the war’s end meant expanding international markets too, the groundwork for the eventual dismantling of the traditional studio system was laid in 1948, with a landmark decision by the U.S. Supreme Court. Previously, film studios had owned their own movie theater chains in which they exhibited the films they produced; however, in *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.*, this vertical integration of the industry—the complete control by one firm of the production, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures—was deemed a violation of antitrust laws.

The HUAC hearings also targeted Hollywood. When Senator McCarthy called eleven “unfriendly witnesses” to testify before Congress about Communism in the film industry in October 1947, only playwright Bertolt Brecht answered questions. The other ten, who refused to testify, were cited for contempt of Congress on November 24. The next day, film executives declared that the so-called “Hollywood Ten” would no longer be employed in the industry until they had sworn they were not Communists (**Figure 28.15**). Eventually, more than three hundred actors, screenwriters, directors, musicians, and other entertainment professionals were placed on the industry blacklist. Some never worked in Hollywood again; others directed films or wrote screenplays under assumed names.



Figure 28.15 One of the original Hollywood Ten, director Edward Dmytryk publicly announced he had once been a Communist and, in April 1951, answered questions and “named names” before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

Click and Explore



Watch a **1953 episode of a popular television show** (<http://openstaxcollege.org//15ThreeLives>) from the 1950s, *I Led Three Lives*, the highly fictionalized story of a member of a Communist organization who is also an FBI informant.

Hollywood reacted aggressively to these various challenges. Filmmakers tried new techniques, like CinemaScope and Cinerama, which allowed movies to be shown on large screens and in 3-D. Audiences were drawn to movies not because of gimmicks, however, but because of the stories they told. Dramas and romantic comedies continued to be popular fare for adults, and, to appeal to teens, studios produced large numbers of horror films and movies starring music idols such as Elvis. Many films took espionage, a timely topic, as their subject matter, and science fiction hits such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, about a small town whose inhabitants fall prey to space aliens, played on audience fears of both Communist invasion and nuclear technology.

THE TRIUMPH OF TELEVISION

By far the greatest challenge to Hollywood, however, came from the relatively new medium of television. Although the technology had been developed in the late 1920s, through much of the 1940s, only a fairly small audience of the wealthy had access to it. As a result, programming was limited. With the post-World War II economic boom, all this changed. Where there had been only 178,000 televisions in homes in 1948, by 1955, over three-quarters of a million U.S. households, about half of all homes, had television (**Figure 28.16**).



Figure 28.16 An American family relaxes in front of their television set in 1958. Many gathered not only to watch the programming but also to eat dinner. The marketing of small folding tray tables and frozen “TV dinners” encouraged such behavior.

Various types of programs were broadcast on the handful of major networks: situation comedies, variety programs, game shows, soap operas, talk shows, medical dramas, adventure series, cartoons, and police procedurals. Many comedies presented an idealized image of white suburban family life: Happy housewife mothers, wise fathers, and mischievous but not dangerously rebellious children were constants on shows like *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* in the late 1950s. These shows also reinforced certain perspectives on the values of individualism and family—values that came to be redefined as “American” in opposition to alleged Communist collectivism. Westerns, which stressed unity in the face of danger and the ability to survive in hostile environments, were popular too. Programming for children began to emerge with shows such as *Captain Kangaroo*, *Romper Room*, and *The Mickey Mouse Club* designed to appeal to members of the baby boom.

28.5 The African American Struggle for Civil Rights

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain how Presidents Truman and Eisenhower addressed civil rights issues
- Discuss efforts by African Americans to end discrimination and segregation
- Describe southern whites’ response to the civil rights movement

In the aftermath of World War II, African Americans began to mount organized resistance to racially discriminatory policies in force throughout much of the United States. In the South, they used a combination of legal challenges and grassroots activism to begin dismantling the racial segregation that had stood for nearly a century following the end of Reconstruction. Community activists and civil rights leaders targeted racially discriminatory housing practices, segregated transportation, and legal requirements that African Americans and whites be educated separately. While many of these challenges were successful, life did not necessarily improve for African Americans. Hostile whites fought these changes in any way they could, including by resorting to violence.

EARLY VICTORIES

During World War II, many African Americans had supported the “Double V Campaign,” which called on them to defeat foreign enemies while simultaneously fighting against segregation and discrimination

at home. After World War II ended, many returned home to discover that, despite their sacrifices, the United States was not willing to extend them any greater rights than they had enjoyed before the war. Particularly rankling was the fact that although African American veterans were legally entitled to draw benefits under the GI Bill, discriminatory practices prevented them from doing so. For example, many banks would not give them mortgages if they wished to buy homes in predominantly African American neighborhoods, which banks often considered too risky an investment. However, African Americans who attempted to purchase homes in white neighborhoods often found themselves unable to do so because of real estate covenants that prevented owners from selling their property to blacks. Indeed, when a black family purchased a Levittown house in 1957, they were subjected to harassment and threats of violence.

Click and Explore



For a look at the **experiences of an African American family** (<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/15Levittown>) that tried to move to a white suburban community, view the 1957 documentary *Crisis in Levittown*.

The postwar era, however, saw African Americans make greater use of the courts to defend their rights. In 1944, an African American woman, Irene Morgan, was arrested in Virginia for refusing to give up her seat on an interstate bus and sued to have her conviction overturned. In *Morgan v. the Commonwealth of Virginia* in 1946, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the conviction should be overturned because it violated the interstate commerce clause of the Constitution. This victory emboldened some civil rights activists to launch the Journey of Reconciliation, a bus trip taken by eight African American men and eight white men through the states of the Upper South to test the South's enforcement of the *Morgan* decision.

Other victories followed. In 1948, in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that courts could not enforce real estate covenants that restricted the purchase or sale of property based on race. In 1950, the NAACP brought a case before the U.S. Supreme Court that they hoped would help to undermine the concept of "separate but equal" as espoused in the 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which gave legal sanction to segregated school systems. *Sweatt v. Painter* was a case brought by Herman Marion Sweatt, who sued the University of Texas for denying him admission to its law school because state law prohibited integrated education. Texas attempted to form a separate law school for African Americans only, but in its decision on the case, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected this solution, holding that the separate school provided neither equal facilities nor "intangibles," such as the ability to form relationships with other future lawyers, that a professional school should provide.

Not all efforts to enact desegregation required the use of the courts, however. On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson started for the Brooklyn Dodgers, playing first base. He was the first African American to play baseball in the National League, breaking the color barrier. Although African Americans had their own baseball teams in the Negro Leagues, Robinson opened the gates for them to play in direct competition with white players in the major leagues. Other African American athletes also began to challenge the segregation of American sports. At the 1948 Summer Olympics, Alice Coachman, an African American, was the only American woman to take a gold medal in the games (**Figure 28.17**). These changes, while symbolically significant, were mere cracks in the wall of segregation.

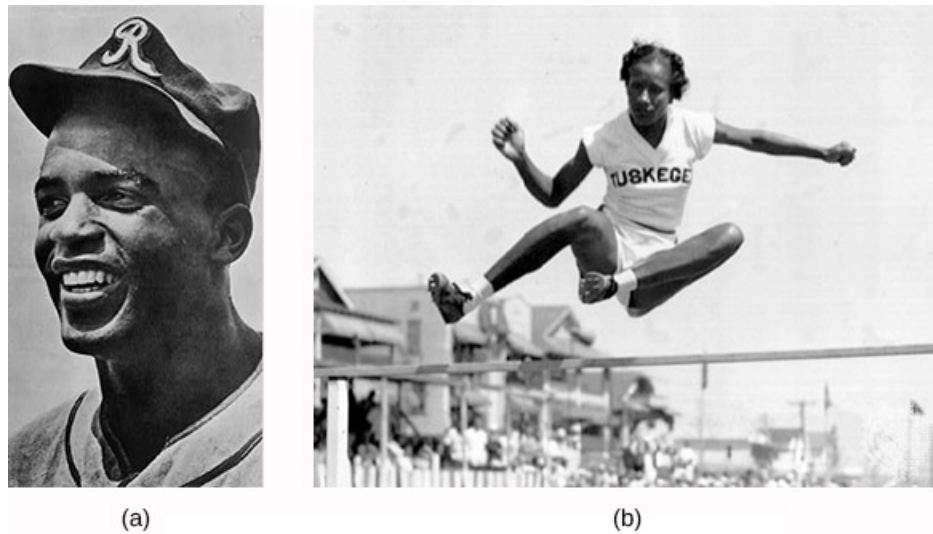


Figure 28.17 Baseball legend Jackie Robinson (a) was active in the civil rights movement. He served on the NAACP's board of directors and helped to found an African American-owned bank. Alice Coachman (b), who competed in track and field at Tuskegee University, was the first black woman to win an Olympic gold medal.

DESEGREGATION AND INTEGRATION

Until 1954, racial segregation in education was not only legal but was required in seventeen states and permissible in several others (**Figure 28.18**). Utilizing evidence provided in sociological studies conducted by Kenneth Clark and Gunnar Myrdal, however, Thurgood Marshall, then chief counsel for the NAACP, successfully argued the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* before the U.S. Supreme Court led by Chief Justice Earl Warren. Marshall showed that the practice of segregation in public schools made African American students feel inferior. Even if the facilities provided were equal in nature, the Court noted in its decision, the very fact that some students were separated from others on the basis of their race made segregation unconstitutional.

U.S. School Segregation prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*

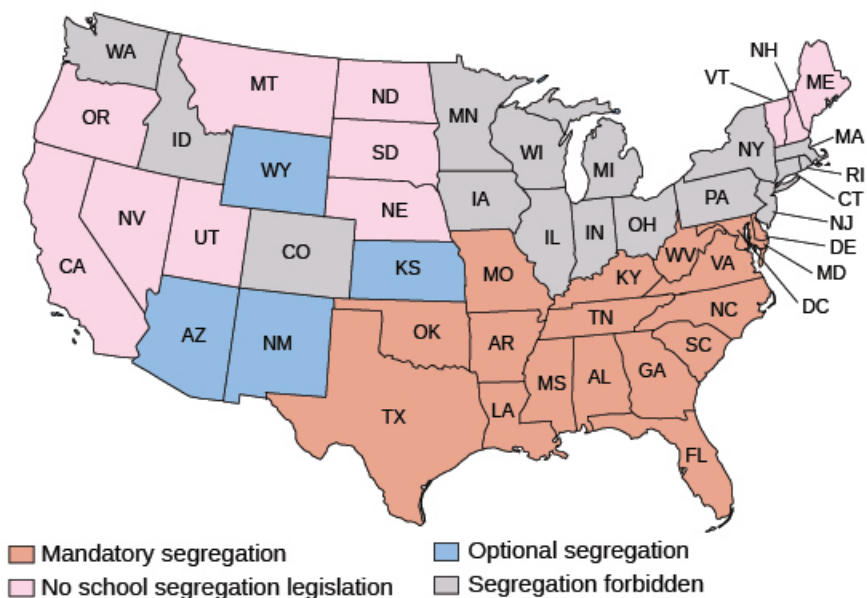


Figure 28.18 This map shows those states in which racial segregation in public education was required by law before the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. In 1960, four years later, fewer than 10 percent of southern African American students attended the same schools as white students.

DEFINING "AMERICAN"

☀ *Thurgood Marshall on Fighting Racism*

As a law student in 1933, Thurgood Marshall (**Figure 28.19**) was recruited by his mentor Charles Hamilton Houston to assist in gathering information for the defense of a black man in Virginia accused of killing two white women. His continued close association with Houston led Marshall to aggressively defend blacks in the court system and to use the courts as the weapon by which equal rights might be extracted from the U.S. Constitution and a white racist system. Houston also suggested that it would be important to establish legal precedents regarding the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling of separate but equal.



Figure 28.19 In 1956, NAACP leaders (from left to right) Henry L. Moon, Roy Wilkins, Herbert Hill, and Thurgood Marshall present a new poster in the campaign against southern white racism. Marshall successfully argued the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) before the U.S. Supreme Court and later became the court's first African American justice.

By 1938, Marshall had become "Mr. Civil Rights" and formally organized the NAACP's Legal Defense and Education Fund in 1940 to garner the resources to take on cases to break the racist justice system of America. A direct result of Marshall's energies and commitment was his 1940 victory in a Supreme Court case, *Chambers v. Florida*, which held that confessions obtained by violence and torture were inadmissible in a court of law. His most well-known case was *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, which held that state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students were unconstitutional.

Later in life, Marshall reflected on his career fighting racism in a speech at Howard Law School in 1978:

Be aware of that myth, that everything is going to be all right. Don't give in. I add that, because it seems to me, that what we need to do today is to refocus. Back in the 30s and 40s, we could go no place but to court. We knew then, the court was not the final solution. Many of us knew the final solution would have to be politics, if for no other reason, politics is cheaper than lawsuits. So now we have both. We have our legal arm, and we have our political arm. Let's use them both. And don't listen to this myth that it can be solved by either or that it has already been solved. Take it from me, it has not been solved.

When Marshall says that the problems of racism have not been solved, to what was he referring?

Plessy v. Ferguson had been overturned. The challenge now was to integrate schools. A year later, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered southern school systems to begin **desegregation** "with all deliberate speed." Some school districts voluntarily integrated their schools. For many other districts, however, "deliberate speed" was very, very slow.

It soon became clear that enforcing *Brown v. the Board of Education* would require presidential intervention. Eisenhower did not agree with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision and did not wish to force southern states to integrate their schools. However, as president, he was responsible for doing so. In 1957, Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, was forced to accept its first nine African American students, who became known as the **Little Rock Nine**. In response, Arkansas governor Orval Faubus called out the state National Guard to prevent the students from attending classes, removing the troops only after Eisenhower told him to do so. A subsequent attempt by the nine students to attend school resulted in mob violence. Eisenhower then placed the Arkansas National Guard under federal control and sent the U.S. Army's 101st airborne unit to escort the students to and from school as well as from class to class (**Figure 28.20**). This was the first time since the end of Reconstruction that federal troops once more protected the rights of African Americans in the South.



Figure 28.20 In 1957, U.S. soldiers from the 101st Airborne were called in to escort the Little Rock Nine into and around formerly all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Throughout the course of the school year, the Little Rock Nine were insulted, harassed, and physically assaulted; nevertheless, they returned to school each day. At the end of the school year, the first African American student graduated from Central High. At the beginning of the 1958–1959 school year, Orval Faubus ordered all Little Rock's public schools closed. In the opinion of white segregationists, keeping all students out of school was preferable to having them attend integrated schools. In 1959, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the school had to be reopened and that the process of desegregation had to proceed.

WHITE RESPONSES

Efforts to desegregate public schools led to a backlash among most southern whites. Many greeted the *Brown* decision with horror; some World War II veterans questioned how the government they had fought for could betray them in such a fashion. Some white parents promptly withdrew their children from public schools and enrolled them in all-white private academies, many newly created for the sole purpose of keeping white children from attending integrated schools. Often, these "academies" held classes in neighbors' basements or living rooms.

Other white southerners turned to state legislatures or courts to solve the problem of school integration. Orders to integrate school districts were routinely challenged in court. When the lawsuits proved unsuccessful, many southern school districts responded by closing all public schools, as Orval Faubus had done after Central High School was integrated. One county in Virginia closed its public schools for five years rather than see them integrated. Besides suing school districts, many southern segregationists filed lawsuits against the NAACP, trying to bankrupt the organization. Many national politicians supported the segregationist efforts. In 1956, ninety-six members of Congress signed "The Southern Manifesto," in which they accused the U.S. Supreme Court of misusing its power and violating the principle of **states' rights**, which maintained that states had rights equal to those of the federal government.

Unfortunately, many white southern racists, frightened by challenges to the social order, responded with violence. When Little Rock's Central High School desegregated, an irate Ku Klux Klansman from a neighboring community sent a letter to the members of the city's school board in which he denounced them as Communists and threatened to kill them. White rage sometimes erupted into murder. In August 1955, both white and black Americans were shocked by the brutality of the murder of Emmett Till. Till, a fourteen-year-old boy from Chicago, had been vacationing with relatives in Mississippi. While visiting a white-owned store, he had made a remark to the white woman behind the counter. A few days later, the husband and brother-in-law of the woman came to the home of Till's relatives in the middle of the night and abducted the boy. Till's beaten and mutilated body was found in a nearby river three days later. Till's mother insisted on an open-casket funeral; she wished to use her son's body to reveal the brutality of southern racism. The murder of a child who had been guilty of no more than a casual remark captured the nation's attention, as did the acquittal of the two men who admitted killing him.

THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

One of those inspired by Till's death was Rosa Parks, an NAACP member from Montgomery, Alabama, who became the face of the 1955–1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott. City ordinances in Montgomery segregated the city's buses, forcing African American passengers to ride in the back section. They had to enter through the rear of the bus, could not share seats with white passengers, and, if the front of the bus was full and a white passenger requested an African American's seat, had to relinquish their place to the white rider. The bus company also refused to hire African American drivers even though most of the people who rode the buses were black.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give her seat to a white man, and the Montgomery police arrested her. After being bailed out of jail, she decided to fight the laws requiring segregation in court. To support her, the Women's Political Council, a group of African American female activists, organized a boycott of Montgomery's buses. News of the boycott spread through newspaper notices and by word of mouth; ministers rallied their congregations to support the Women's Political Council. Their efforts were successful, and forty thousand African American riders did not take the bus on December 5, the first day of the boycott.

Other African American leaders within the city embraced the boycott and maintained it beyond December 5, Rosa Parks' court date. Among them was a young minister named Martin Luther King, Jr. For the next year, black Montgomery residents avoided the city's buses. Some organized carpools. Others paid for rides in African American-owned taxis, whose drivers reduced their fees. Most walked to and from school, work, and church for 381 days, the duration of the boycott. In June 1956, an Alabama federal court found the segregation ordinance unconstitutional. The city appealed, but the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the decision. The city's buses were desegregated.

Key Terms

baby boom a marked increase in the U.S. birthrate during 1946–1964

blacklist a list of people suspected of having Communist sympathies who were denied work as a result

Cold War the prolonged period of tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, based on ideological conflicts and competition for military, economic, social, and technological superiority, and marked by surveillance and espionage, political assassinations, an arms race, attempts to secure alliances with developing nations, and proxy wars

containment the U.S. policy that sought to limit the expansion of Communism abroad

desegregation the removal of laws and policies requiring the separation of different racial or ethnic groups

domino theory the theory that if Communism made inroads in one nation, surrounding nations would also succumb one by one, like a chain of dominos toppling one another

Fair Deal President Harry Truman's program of economic and social reform

GI Bill a program that gave substantial benefits to those who served in World War II

Iron Curtain a term coined by Winston Churchill to refer to portions of Eastern Europe that the Soviet Union had incorporated into its sphere of influence and that no longer were free to manage their own affairs

Levittowns suburban housing developments consisting of acres of mass-produced homes

Little Rock Nine the nickname for the nine African American high school students who first integrated Little Rock's Central High School

Marshall Plan a program giving billions of dollars of U.S. aid to European countries to prevent them from turning to Communism

massive retaliation a defense strategy, sometimes called "mutually assured destruction" or MAD, adopted by Eisenhower that called for launching a large-scale nuclear attack on the Soviet Union in response to a first Soviet strike at the United States

military-industrial complex the matrix of relationships between officials in the Defense Department and executives in the defense industry who all benefited from increases in defense spending

rock and roll a musical form popular among the baby boomers that encompassed styles ranging from country to blues, and embraced themes such as youthful rebellion and love

Sputnik the first manmade orbital satellite, launched by the Soviet Union in October 1957

states' rights the political belief that states possess authority beyond federal law, which is usually seen as the supreme law of the land, and thus can act in opposition to federal law

Summary

28.1 The Challenges of Peacetime

At the end of World War II, U.S. servicemen and women returned to civilian life, and all hoped the

prosperity of the war years would continue. The GI Bill eased many veterans' return by providing them with unemployment compensation, low-interest loans, and money to further their education; however, African American, Mexican American, and gay veterans were often unable to take advantage of these benefits fully or at all. Meanwhile, Japanese Americans faced an uphill struggle in their attempts to return to normalcy, and many women who had made significant professional gains in wartime found themselves dismissed from their positions. President Harry Truman attempted to extend Roosevelt's New Deal with his own Fair Deal, which had the goal of improving wages, housing, and healthcare, and protecting the rights of African Americans. Confronted by a Congress dominated by Republicans and southern Democrats, however, Truman was able to achieve only some of his goals.

28.2 The Cold War

Joy at the ending of World War II was quickly replaced by fears of conflict with the Soviet Union. The Cold War heated up as both the United States and Soviet Union struggled for world dominance. Fearing Soviet expansion, the United States committed itself to assisting countries whose governments faced overthrow by Communist forces and gave billions of dollars to war-torn Europe to help it rebuild. While the United States achieved victory in its thwarting of Soviet attempts to cut Berlin off from the West, the nation was less successful in its attempts to prevent Communist expansion in Korea. The development of atomic weapons by the Soviet Union and the arrest of Soviet spies in the United States and Britain roused fears in the United States that Communist agents were seeking to destroy the nation from within. Loyalty board investigations and hearings before House and Senate committees attempted to root out Soviet sympathizers in the federal government and in other sectors of American society, including Hollywood and the military.

28.3 The American Dream

In 1953, Dwight D. Eisenhower became president of the United States. Fiscally conservative but ideologically moderate, he sought to balance the budget while building a strong system of national defense. This defense policy led to a greater emphasis on the possible use of nuclear weapons in any confrontation with the Soviet Union. Committed to maintaining peace, however, Eisenhower avoided engaging the United States in foreign conflicts; during his presidency, the economy boomed. Young Americans married in record numbers, moved to the growing suburbs, and gave birth to the largest generation to date in U.S. history. As middle-class adults, they conformed to the requirements of corporate jobs and suburban life, while their privileged children enjoyed a consumer culture tailored to their desires.

28.4 Popular Culture and Mass Media

Young Americans in the postwar period had more disposable income and enjoyed greater material comfort than their forebears. These factors allowed them to devote more time and money to leisure activities and the consumption of popular culture. Rock and roll, which drew from African American roots in the blues, embraced themes popular among teenagers, such as young love and rebellion against authority. At the same time, traditional forms of entertainment, such as motion pictures, came under increasing competition from a relatively new technology, television.

28.5 The African American Struggle for Civil Rights

After World War II, African American efforts to secure greater civil rights increased across the United States. African American lawyers such as Thurgood Marshall championed cases intended to destroy the Jim Crow system of segregation that had dominated the American South since Reconstruction. The landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* prohibited segregation in public schools, but not

all school districts integrated willingly, and President Eisenhower had to use the military to desegregate Little Rock's Central High School. The courts and the federal government did not assist African Americans in asserting their rights in other cases. In Montgomery, Alabama, it was the grassroots efforts of African American citizens who boycotted the city's bus system that brought about change. Throughout the region, many white southerners made their opposition to these efforts known. Too often, this opposition manifested itself in violence and tragedy, as in the murder of Emmett Till.

Review Questions

- Truman referred to his program of economic and social reform as the _____.
 - New Deal
 - Square Deal
 - Fair Deal
 - Straight Deal
- Which of the following pieces of Truman's domestic agenda was rejected by Congress?
 - the Taft-Hartley Act
 - national healthcare
 - the creation of a civil rights commission
 - funding for schools
- How did the GI Bill help veterans return to civilian life? What were its limitations?
- What was the policy of trying to limit the expansion of Soviet influence abroad?
 - restraint
 - containment
 - isolationism
 - quarantine
- The Truman administration tried to help Europe recover from the devastation of World War II with the _____.
 - Economic Development Bank
 - Atlantic Free Trade Zone
 - Byrnes Budget
 - Marshall Plan
- What was agreed to at the armistice talks between North and South Korea?
- The name of the first manmade satellite, launched by the Soviet Union in 1957, was _____.
 - Triton*
 - Cosmolskaya*
 - Pravda*
 - Sputnik*
- The first Levittown was built _____.
 - in Bucks County, Pennsylvania
 - in Nassau County, New York
 - near Newark, New Jersey
 - near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- How did suburbanization help the economy?
- The disc jockey who popularized rock and roll was _____.
 - Bill Haley
 - Elvis Presley
 - Alan Freed
 - Ed Sullivan
- What challenges did Hollywood face in the 1950s?
- The NAACP lawyer who became known as "Mr. Civil Rights" was _____.
 - Earl Warren
 - Jackie Robinson
 - Orval Faubus
 - Thurgood Marshall
- The Arkansas governor who tried to prevent the integration of Little Rock High School was _____.
 - Charles Hamilton Houston
 - Kenneth Clark
 - Orval Faubus
 - Clark Clifford

14. What was the significance of *Shelley v. Kraemer*?

Critical Thinking Questions

15. How did some Americans turn their wartime experiences into lasting personal gains (i.e. better employment, a new home, or an education) after the war was over? Why did others miss out on these opportunities?

16. What was the reason for the breakdown in friendly relations between the United States and the Soviet Union after World War II? What were the results of this conflict?

17. How did fear of the Soviet Union and Communism affect American culture and society?

18. What social changes took place in the United States after World War II? What role did the war play in those changes?

19. How did the wartime experiences of African Americans contribute to the drive for greater civil rights after the war?

